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POLITICAL SYSTEMS IN THE NETHERLAND ANTILLES

Prof. A. de Waal Malefijt

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David Lebenstein

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Although the title of this paper is "Political Systems in the Netherlands Antilles", I would like to stress that my prime focus will concentrate on the island of Aruba and its local political setup. The entire Netherlands Antilles will be touched upon, but for obvious reasons, Aruba must serve as the main discussion in this paper. The paper will include a brief explanation of the political institutions and a general description of the government and its operations. Specific political issues, problems and observations will make up the largest portion of this paper. At this point, I would like to acknowledge Dr. A. de Waal Malefijt, Mrs. Marcia Hellerman and Dr. A. Van den doel for their fine assistance to me in meeting informants and formulating ideas for this paper.

\* Aruba, as did all the Netherlands Antilles, became autonomous in 1954, gaining equal status as a member of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, with the right to administer internal affairs. There is a Governor of the entire N.A. as well as one Lt. Governor for each island. The Staten, (like a House of Representatives, the Federal Legislature) is elected every four years by free election, at which time the Council of Ministers is formed. This Federal Legislature consists of twenty-two members, divided as follows: Curacao, 12 members; Aruba, 8 members; Bonaire, 1 member; ~~W~~illard Islands, 1 member.

\* An election is also held every four years on each island for the Island Council, which consists of twenty-one members. Every person of Dutch nationality residing longer than 30 days in the Netherlands Antilles and 23 years or older has the right to vote.

\* Based on democratic principles, the constitution provides the following rights: Equal protection for all people and property, freedom of press, religion and education, right of petition and inviolability of private property.

\* This paragraph is taken from the Aruba Holiday magazine.

Aruba has five political parties. They are the Aruban Patriots Party (PPA), Aruban Peoples Party (AVP), National Aruban Union (UNA), Workers Revolutionary Party (PRO), and the Aruban Independent Party (PIA). Although no fundamental ideological principles separate the different parties, clear and distinct ethnic patterns exist within the parties. In addition, on particular issues, there seems to be clear contrasts. All informants conceded that each political party hoped to make the island more prosperous. All sides had some compliments and criticisms for each other.

The PPA political party has ten seats on the Island Council, short only one for a majority. Clearly, PPA is the largest political party on Aruba. Its support comes from a quite broad and diversified political and ethnic spectrum. Almost all "non-Arubans" support this party. By "non-Aruban" we mean all those whose parents were not born on Aruba and whose parents were not born on Aruba, even though they are of Dutch nationality. "Non-Arubans" include people from Curacao, Bonaire, the Windward Islands, Surinam and Holland. A majority of these people are black. In 1954, when Aruba received autonomy, PPA came to power for the first time. They reigned twelve years, winning three general election and were finally defeated in 1966 by a coalition of the other four parties. PPA still commands a great deal of power and respect. On each of the other five islands, PPA's sister party, the Democrats, control the Island Councils.

Some of PPA's accomplishments during their time in office include the following. They did much for education. Not only did they build many new schools, but for the first time, you didn't have to pay for books pencils and bussing. Informant number 4 also says that they were concerned about the poor, the blacks, the unemployed and the underprivileged. Many

AVP leaders conceded that PPA did much for tourism, roads and they were responsible for the creation of the modern water and electrical plant at Balashi. Hotels and chemical plants were also constructed during PPA's reign. Why then wasn't PPA reelected? There are many answers to this question. First of all, people from all the parties, including PPA admitted that the government from 1963-67 has a very lackluster performance; the drive and spirit was no longer with the PPA leaders. In addition, there was the intense desire of all non-PPA people to come to power. Thus, all of the other four parties joined together and barely inched out PPA. The present breakdown on the Island Council is: PPA- 10 seats, AVP- 8 seats, UNA, PIA and PRO, each with one seat.

AVP, now in power on Aruba, is the most important and powerful party of the four in the coalition. It is clearly a more conservative party than PPA with its main theme being "nationalism". Its famous slogans include: "Aruba for the Arubans" and "The Aruban Struggle". One PPA leader commented that AVP Arubans are "nationalistic to the point of chauvinism". People from AVP despise all non-Arubans. They readily admit that they prefer Arubans to be white and point with pride to their "Indian" heritage and coloring. AVP is continuing and expanding on programs begun by PPA for the economic betterment of the island. In the last two years, seven new schools were built and five extensions were made. A bridge is now being built and construction on three more hotels has begun. The present government also hopes to build a water purification plant for irrigation and a large golf course as a tourist attraction. An extension of Balashi, to aid Lago is also being planned. A floating dry dock and a free zone are other AVP goals. Despite all of this, many of my informants seem to feel that if an election were held today, PPA would win and that even in two years from now, it will be difficult for the coalition to be reelected. Speculation on why this is so involves the fact that a coalition of four parties creates many different opinions and ideas, thus, much chaos.

Also, many people seem to feel that promises made by the new government have not been kept. Another point is that PPA can get more from the federal government since the Democrats are in control there. Thus, AVP and the Nationals are a minority and have little Federal political power.

The other three political parties are all quite small. However, when they joined together in a coalition, they discovered much power. UNA is the most conservative of the three smaller parties. Most people agree that the majority of UNA supporters reside in Nord and Santa Cruz\* and that they are generally devout, almost fanatic, Catholics. PIA is a very small party with support from different parts of the island. PRO finds its support among the laborers. Its leader, Wykie Maduro, a declared socialist, is also President of three labor unions including the Aruban Lago Oil Workers. Despite Mr. Maduro's far left political philosophy, he still has no misgivings about teaming up with the other three, more conservative parties. In my view, the explanation for this is practical politics and the desire for increased political power and prestige.

During these interviews, many concrete political problems were observed. The problem that Arubans continually brought up was the rivalry between Aruba and Curacao, and the desire on the part of many Arubans for autonomy and independence from Curacao. Arubans feel shortchanged and discriminated against. The capital of the N.A. is in Curacao. The Governor lives there and the government functions there. More industry is present on Curacao than Aruba. At one time, an American Consulate was present on Aruba. Now, it is located only in Curacao. The Governor, by unwritten tradition usually comes from Curacao. An Aruban has never been Governor of the N.A. These are just some of the points that turn Arubans against the island of Curacao. I believe that there is another reason for this hostility, a

\*The majority of PPA's support is in San Nicolas and the cunuku. AVP depends upon Oranjestad.

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far more basic one. Aruba is the only island in the Netherlands Antilles with a white majority(85%). On the other hand, Curacao, and the other four islands are dominated by blacks. Arubans were never slaves and they dislike the thought that people from Curacao, former slaves, are dominating them. Informant number 13 said that people from Curacao were "of a different race and we do not like them telling us what to do. We want a larger share of our tax money returned(sounds like N.Y.C. doesn't it?)".

Arubans, particularly those supporting AVP and the coalition, would like to see immediate independence from Curacao, while still maintaining ties with the rest of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Many Arubans feel that they are not fairly represented in the Staten(they have 8 out of 22 seats as opposed to Curacao's 12). They feel that the number of seats in the Federal Legislature should be determined by the per capita income(Aruba has the highest of all 6 islands).\*\*

The new government has appointed a committee to study more autonomy for Aruba. Most observers agree that the committee is a farce. Aruba will never receive autonomy from Curacao. Why? First of all, it would have to be approved by the legislatures of the Netherlands Antilles, Surinam and Holland. Secondly, AVP is equivalent to the Nationals on a federal level. The Democrats are in power on every island except Aruba and they are content with the present N.A. setup.

There are many other political problems and issues. Everyone is concerned with the economic development of the island. Many people are angered over politicians not keeping their promises. Others are involved with the labor movement and its place in politics.

\*\*It should be pointed out that by U.S. standards the proportion of seats is quite just, as Curacao has twice the number of people of Aruba.

Unemployment is still a big problem. Lago has laid off many workers and unemployment on the island is now at an all time high. Part of this problem is the desire of white Arubans to have first preference over non-Arubans at any and all jobs. Often, the non-Arubans are more qualified for the position. This creates hostility between the Arubans and the non-Arubans. Recently, five positions at the airport were available and only one was given to an Aruban. This enraged many Arubans. On the other hand, it is a recognized fact that it is quite difficult for a blackman(non-Araban) to get a good job within the government. Previously, during PPA's reign, it was easier.

There are some racial problems too although they are partially hidden. For instance, many Arubans feel that blacks from Curacao are responsible for most of Aruba's crime. They don't mind the *ingles*. Some Arubans feel that there is hostility and bigotry on the part of blacks toward whites. Informant number 15 said the following: "I don't like blacks because of their way of life, their mentality and life style. IT's not their color. If you give them a finger, they'll take the whole hand. They compensate for their inferiority by playing tough. Most people don't discriminate between black and white but I do....They(referring to Curacao blacks) are the worst kind of colored people. They are terrible troublemakers!".

Similarly, the blacks had grievances against the whites. Informant number 8 said: "...whites discriminate against dark people. Why even in a white family the darkest son is called the "nigger son". PPA gave everyone a fair shake; AVP did not. Many white people are troublemakers. When they are drunk, they say the worst things against negroes. If a black policeman tells a white what to do, the white does not listen to him or respect him". Informant number four insisted that it was much harder for a black to get a job. Despite all of these complaints from black and white people, everyone agreed that no threat of a "militant" or "black power"

movement was imminent. Even the blacks said that they would not support such a movement. Only one informant, a white, felt that the "black power" movement would ever come at all. A few said it would start first in Curacao.

Another thing that impressed me was that everyone seemed to point to Curacao, in terms of race problems, and said that it was much worse there. Many felt that discrimination, bigotry and general race problems were blatant in Curacao while on Aruba they exist, but do not appear in an obvious fashion.

On one issue in particular, I found unanimity. Arubans are very nationalistic and they are Aruban first, not Antillian or Dutch. This seems true on the other islands as well. Arubans claim that the fact that the "Carnival" takes place on Aruba only is an indication of the peoples unity and patriotism.

Almost all of my informants felt that Arubans follow politics with great interest, particularly during election time. Informant number 6 felt that "Arubans have not, as yet, developed the maturity to judge politicians the right way. They will in due time but not in the near future". There were mixed opinions on the question of whether or not it is easy to become involved in politics on Aruba. Some felt that it was easy for anyone, regardless of color or status. Others insisted that you needed to be well-known, have money and a political party behind you. One informant said that you had to be a good liar. A few others felt that you should be articulate and able to accept many insults and threats of blackmail.

Most Arubans look up to the United States and are concerned about its policies. However, few voiced specific opinions on important issues. Instead, they griped about President Kennedy withdrawing the American consulate in 1962 without any explanation or apology. They also expressed a profound interest in baseball.

All but one of my informants felt that relations with Venezuela were good. Informant number 12 said that "People are afraid that Venezuela will take over Aruba should Aruba ever break with Holland. The three leeward islands are still considered, by the Venezuelans, to be their property!".

There was considerable difference of opinion on who should be considered an Aruban. Legally, anyone who is born on Aruba, or whose parents were born on Aruba is considered an Aruban. However, older white Arubans insist that in order to be Aruban your forefathers should have lived here for several generations. In addition, one should have a traditional name such as Croes, Arends or Maduro. The younger generation of Arubans (people 25-35 years of age), are more liberal on this question. Informants 7, 14 and 15 all felt that someone who comes from another country should be given the opportunity to naturalize if "his heart is in the right place". Informant 15 said: "Although I prefer an Aruban to be born here, his parents and grandparents too, there is room for leeway on this question. If one had adapted to the situation, the way of living, the language, the mentality and is willing to defend Aruba, he may be considered an Aruban. Curacao blacks living here should not be considered Arubans because their hearts and family ties are still in Curacao. At football games, Aruba vs. Curacao, the Curacao blacks root for Curacao".

Informant number 6 said that "An Aruban is anyone who works here, earns a living and is working for the betterment of the island". Informant number 2 felt that anyone whose father was born in the N.A. should be an Aruban. Informants 14 said the following: "Anyone putting any kind of effort into the island, either financial or emotional, should be called an Aruban". It was conceded by Informant 11 that "although one should be born of Aruban parents, it is possible to feel Aruban and not be one. There is prejudice and discrimination on this question. No blackman can be an Aruban.

This problem will be solved when the U.S. solves its racial problems. Aruba looks to the U.S. as its laboratory". Informants 4 and 8, who were black, did not want to be considered Aruban. "Arubans are light colored" they said. "I wouldn't like to be Aruban because of the way they treat the colored". Mr. Petrona, the highest ranking black in the Aruban government,(he is from Curacao) once said the following in a speech: "Call me stupid, call me a nigger, call me a pig or a dog, but don't call me an Aruban!"

On the issue of religion there seemed to be no conflict. Aruba is 90% Catholic, yet the majority of important government officials are Protestant. No one complains about this; they are satisfied. There seems to be religious freedom for everyone on Aruba. I did observe a significant division among Catholics. Either they were religious fanatics, or, they were not religious at all and openly ridiculed and laughed at those "fanatic worshippers".

It was quite difficult to learn about specific political problems and issues on the other five islands. During Easter vacation, I spent one day in Curacao and a weekend in Bonaire(also 2 days in Caracas). I will now try to briefly recount my observations and impressions of both islands.

Curacao seemed to be the most modern and the most "tourist designed" island. There were terrible traffic jams and people were continually honking their horns, for no apparent reason(just like N.Y.C.). Many people were inconsiderate and unfriendly. This view was reconfirmed not only by Arubans, but by people whom I spoke to on Bonaire. I did not receive any political information about Curacao, other than the fact that the local government there, and the Island Council are setup the same as on Aruba. In addition, the two main political parties are the NVP whose counterparts in Aruba are the AVP and the Democrats(in power now), whose cohorts are PPA. Both parties are quite racially mixed. As a result of the Shell oil refinery, (and of course other factors), Curacao seems to be more Dutch oriented while Aruba, partially due to Esso, is more American oriented.

The friendliest people I encountered on my trip were from Bonaire. Everyone was just so kind. Each night on Bonaire, we stayed at a different persons house; we never used a hotel. On our last night there, we were given <sup>one of</sup> access to <sup>one of</sup> Lt. Governor Sale's secluded beach houses. Governor Debrot was also on Bonaire that weekend but my attempts to interview him and/or the Lt. Governor failed. Informant number 5 said that political parties on Bonaire include: Obrero, PPB, U, and the PD which has been in power for the last four years. He said that he had no interest in politics or voting and that in the previous election, there were no controversies or important political issues. The Lt. Governor appears often at social events. When I was in Bonaire, elections for Bonaires representative in the Miss World contest was being selected-held. The Lt. Governor opened up the occasion.

Informant 4 supplied me with some sparse information about the Windward Islands. The most important island of the three is San Martin. She said that people from the other two islands describe themselves as Windward Islanders while people from San Martin are San Martiners. The Democrats are also in power on the Windward Islands. My informant was pleased with them and felt that they do the most for everyone. She said that the "finest people in the world come from the Windward Island. Even if they are poor they'll put you up and feed you. People from Curacao are bad-they just don't care about you. You even have to pay for a glass of water there!".

In conclusion, political systems in the Netherlands Antilles, particularly Aruba, are quite an interesting field of study. Many political situations on Aruba remind us of happenings here in the United States. On some other points, there are complete contrasts between things accepted in the States and on Aruba. By examining Aruba's political parties, the structure of the Federal government and the opinions of the people, we have learned much about politics on Aruba, and political systems in the entire Netherlands Antilles.

LIST OF INFORMANTS

This list includes the date(s) the informant was interviewed and a short description of the individual.

1. Raymond Debrot-2-16-69- a photographer and friend of Dr. Malefijt, he is also the nephew of the Governor of the Netherlands Antilles.
2. Ito Tromp- 2-25-69 and 4-21-69- a representative from the Bureau of Culture and Education.
3. Dr. Jon Hartog- 4-24-69- Director of the library in Oranjestad and author of Aruba: past and present.
4. Filicita Lewis-3-17-69-maid for house number 333.
5. Meno Nicolas-4-6-69-Hertz representative in Bonaire.
6. Wykie Maduro-4-14-69- Leader of PRO political party; its only representative on the Island Council. He is also President of three labor unions including the Aruban Lago Oil Workers.
7. Betico Croes-4-14-69- minister of Education, Deputy and member of Island Council from AVP political party.
8. Mr. Wijngaarde-4-16-69- A retired invalid and blackman from Surinam, he is a former member of the Island Council with the PPA political party.
9. <sup>Gusman</sup> Max Croes-4-17-69-Deputy, member of Island Council and federal legislature; he is the leader of the AVP political party.
10. Max Croes-4-17-69- Deputy, member of the Island Council and leader of PIA political party.
11. Thomas Leest-4-17-69- Deputy-member of island council from UNA political party. He recently resigned after being accused of fraud and accepting bribes. He has not as yet, been convicted or acquitted.
12. Mr. Finck-4-22-69-member of Island Council, Federal Legislature-leader of PPA on Aruba and speaker for the democrats in Curacao.

13. Apolonio Werlerman- 4-22-69-member of Island Council, leader of UNA party and also in charge of public relations for Lago.
14. Messers Arends and Croes-4-25-69- Owner of Texas Furniture store and men who keep up with politics in general.
15. Colby Coronell-5-5-69- school teacher and loyal and active member of the AVP political party.

GENERAL TYPES OF QUESTIONS ASKED TO INFORMANTS

1. How does the Aruban government work and what is its relationship to the entire NA government?
2. Describe the various political parties, their principles and generally, what types of people would be likely to support each party? Why did AVP win in the last election? How are they better and/or worse than PPA? What are some important recent political issues?
3. Are there any rivalries between Aruba and other islands? How nationalistic are people on each island? Do people on Aruba consider themselves first Arubans, Antillians or Dutch? What is your conception of who is an Aruban? How do people feel about independence from Curacao and/or Holland?
4. Are people on Aruba interested or apathetic toward politics? Is it easy to become involved in politics? Do people vote for the person of the party?
5. How do the various races and religions interact? Is there a race problem? Do you think that there is a lot of discrimination against any particular ethnic group? Is there a black power movement here or on the other islands? Is the new government doing anything to help minorities (more or less than the former government)? Is it harder to get a job if you are black? Do most people support separating church and state?
6. How do most Arubans feel about the United States and its policies? Is there any hostile feeling between Aruba and Venezuela?

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5. Chart of structure of government of Netherlands Antilles by Ito Tromp.